

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence

22 April 1975

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam
(As of 1600 EDST)
No. 21

Reaction to Thieu's Resignation

1. There is near unanimous agreement among senior South Vietnamese civilian and military officials that President Thieu's decision to resign was a good one and that a new government should be formed immediately to attempt to arrange negotiations with the Communists. Nguyen Ba Can has told President Huong that he would resign and assist in any way possible to form a new cabinet. Beyond this, however, there are few specifics on what form the new government will take or who will serve in it.

2. General "Big" Minh, probably the leading candidate to head a new cabinet, is calling for a new government which would include staunch anti-Thieu members of the Catholic and Buddhist opposition groups. Former vice-president Ky wants to lead a new government, which would include General Vien, the chairman of the Joint General Staff, and former Prime Minister Khiem. "Big" Minh, in Ky's words, would play a "ceremonial role." There is also some maneuvering in the Senate to replace Tran Van Lam with Buddhist leader Vu Van Mau to allow Mau to become president when Huong resigns.

3. Communist reaction to Thieu's resignation continues to provide no encouragement for the prospects of meaningful negotiations. The Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary

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Government dismissed Thieu's departure as a "clumsy and deceptive trick." Hanoi's Radio and party daily, Nhan Dan, focused on the continuation of American support for the new government and stated that the US in effect had replaced one loser with another. The North Vietnamese commentaries also gave considerable attention to the withdrawal of Americans from South Vietnam. They stated that all Americans could be evacuated "in a very short time, even in one day, without any difficulty or obstacle." They went on to strongly condemn US expressions of concern about Communist reprisals and warned against any US effort to evacuate large numbers of South Vietnamese. US naval vessels moving toward South Vietnamese waters, it was stated, are far more than would be needed simply to evacuate Americans.

4. In short, the Communists are continuing to demand a totally new South Vietnamese government and a quick and total US withdrawal as the price for a negotiated surrender. At least in their public commentary, there is no hint of give in their position, but there is the clear implication that time is quickly running out.

Military Action

5. Communist shellings and ground attacks have fallen off sharply as both sides appear to be getting ready for future combat. The only significant military action was the reopening of Route 22 south of Tay Ninh City on April 22. Initial reporting indicates that elements of the North Vietnamese 316th Division were involved in the fighting. The South Vietnamese 25th Division headquarters reported the Communists sustained heavy casualties and that the North Vietnamese soldiers were very young and obviously inexperienced in combat.

South Vietnamese Estimate Gloomy

6. A South Vietnamese estimate of Communist intentions and capabilities as of April 22 indicated that the current

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lull in military activity is only to permit the Communists time to prepare their forces and coordinate plans to launch a combined attack on Bien Hoa and Saigon. The estimate of the ability of the government forces to resist the anticipated final thrust towards the capital city is bleak. Senior officials believe that if the attack is well coordinated, the government's defenses could crumble in a matter of hours. The estimate considers Saigon's remaining forces as battle weary, understrength, and unlikely to make a determined stand. South Vietnamese pilots are reportedly ready to fly out of the country and the military planners are not counting heavily on their support in a final battle. It is also expected that most of the territorial forces, National Police, and some regular soldiers will desert to look after their families.

7. Many senior South Vietnamese officials are beginning to seek a way to escape from the country. This effort has become the major concern of key staff officers at Military Region 3 headquarters and as a result much of the necessary coordination and staff work is not being done. 25X1

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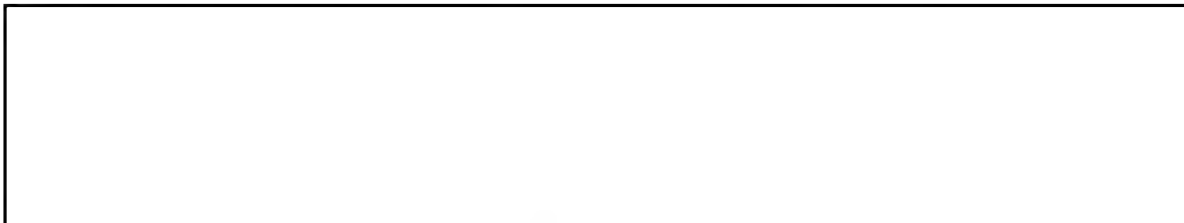
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Bien Hoa in Communist Artillery Umbrella

11. The Bien Hoa airbase and nearby munitions depot at Long Binh are being shelled almost daily by North Vietnamese long range artillery. A shelling on April 22 reportedly caused a number of explosions in one of the munitions storage areas near Bien Hoa.



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Government Realigns Bien Hoa - Long Binh Defenses

13. The South Vietnamese have now decided to transfer only one of the two Marine brigades at Bien Hoa back to Vung Tau. The other brigade will continue to man defensive positions in the Long Binh area. The Marines suffer from poor morale and a lack of discipline, and they probably will not fight hard if attacked.

14. The 18th Division and the Airborne's 1st Brigade are now moving into the Bien Hoa - Long Binh area to strengthen government defenses. Both units withdrew in an orderly fashion from Xuan Loc, and they appear to be capable of further combat. The division, however, has only two regiments. A third was virtually destroyed in the Xuan Loc fighting.

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